

Sunday School

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

Acts 2:32-42.

January 17, 1909.

LESSON COMMENTS.

Verses 22-36.

Peter's Sermon.—It was the day of Pentecost. The mockers had charged that the speaking with tongues was the work of drunken men. Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, refuted this charge by reciting the prophecy of Joel and claiming its fulfillment in this sign of tongues. He then lifts up Jesus Christ to the multitude.

First of all he presents Jesus as a man approved of God by miracles and wonders; a man whose life challenged attention. Peter's sermon is a sample to all ministers and teachers of the word. Through all the ages Jesus Christ is the central theme for preacher and teacher. Round about him we see the truths of redemption hanging in clusters.

V. 23. Here is the doctrine of divine sovereignty. Jesus Christ did not die the accidental victim of mob violence. His death was not simply an example of great love sacrificing itself as a patriot will die for his country, or a mother for her child, waiting on him, nursing him and loving him unto her death. He was delivered by God's deliberate and determined plan. The death of Jesus Christ was as truly a part of God's plan as was his birth. We sometimes stand aghast at an awful crime, and some will contend that God has nothing to do with it. It is accidental, men say, or the natural result of human passion, or it comes to pass through the instigation of the devil. Well, sure enough, in all crime we see the passions of men and the wickedness of Satan, but God's hand is on both man and devil. This way shalt thou go and none other. Thus far shalt thou go and no farther.

The most dreadful crime of the ages was the crucifixion of Jesus, and it occurred through God's deliberate plan. This great truth should quiet our minds and steady our gaze as we read the dark pages of history. As Jesus Christ, our sovereign head and elder brother, suffered through God's plan, his children, members of his body, shall likewise suffer through God's plan. If, therefore, men are sawn asunder or exposed to wild beasts and devoured, or burned in the fire, it should comfort them to know that back of it all is God's will, and God is our Father.

But along with divine sovereignty we see equally set forth the doctrine of human responsibility. These wicked Jews were not mere machines. They were rational, intelligent, responsible agents. They hated Jesus and killed him because they wanted to kill him. Their wicked behavior was the expression of their own choice. Granted that God reigned over them, their wickedness was none the less real and they were none the less responsible. The doctrine of a divine plan should fill us with strength. The doctrine of human responsibility should keep us awake forever. Does one charge God with being the author of the sin when he planned the crucifixion? But God is not the author of sin. As the wise engineer effectually secures the flow of bad waters through one channel rather than another and is not the author of the badness of the waters, so God causes the poison of sin to discharge itself in one act rather than another and is not the author of the poison.

Next in order after the crucifixion of Jesus, Peter preaches the resurrection. Only a few in that great crowd had seen Jesus after he was risen; so Peter brings up David, and from his language proves the necessity of the resurrection. David had spoken of his flesh resting in the grave, of his soul going to Hades; and yet he declares that this flesh of his should rest in hope that his soul should not be left in hell and that his Holy One should not see corruption. "Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance." Peter, full of the Holy Ghost, applied these words to Jesus, the Son of David. Everybody knew that David was dead and that his flesh had seen corruption. Over yonder in a vale was the sepulchre of David. So that, if David's words were true, they were bound to refer to Jesus of Nazareth. He was the only descendant of David that ever claimed to have been dead and risen again. That very Jesus,

Peter declares, has God raised up, and we apostles and brethren have seen him.

Peter uses the prophet David to prove the ascension of Jesus; for David had said, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies thy footstool." But David's dust was over yonder in his sepulchre. If David's words were true, they could refer only to Jesus, the Son of David. It was then a simple question: Was David true or false? No Jew could believe that David was false. To the Jew David stood forth as the true prophet of God. Then Jesus must not only have risen from the dead, but likewise have ascended to heaven.

Further still: Jesus Christ exalted to the right hand of God the Father is the great fountain from whom the Holy Ghost is poured out on the world. This Jesus, then, risen from the dead and ascended to the heavens, and being the fulness of God's promise to the world—this Jesus God hath made Lord and Christ.

Verses 37-40.

The Multitude Convicted.—The Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, and that Word pierced the heart of the people. The Holy Spirit opened the eyes of the multitude to see that Peter's words were true, and, with a burning sense of sin, they uttered the cry of the ages, What shall we do? Peter said, **Repent.** On a similar occasion Paul said to the jailer, **Believe.** There is no contradiction between Peter and Paul. Repentance and faith are always associated. In repentance one looks away from his sin. In faith he looks to Christ. The one of these graces never appears in a man's experience without the other, and both are gifts of God's grace. Repentance might be called the fruit of faith, and faith the tree on which repentance grows. But repentance is the thing that men can see, and therefore Peter puts it to the front. Besides, faith is implied in the command to be baptized; so that Peter's doctrines run thus: Repent, Believe, Confess, and you shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.

The Gospel that Peter preached is the Gospel that comes down through the ages; for the "promise is unto you and your children." The promise that God gave to Abraham, with its conditions and requirements, was ratified to Isaac, and Peter now declares that the same old promise should hold good to all covenant parents and their children.

Verses 41, 42.

The Three Thousand.—In a moment of time, perhaps, the light of God streamed into the hearts of these men and they received the word gladly. Unreservedly they accepted Jesus as their King, and the Church of the new dispensation starts forward upon its long career. From that day to the present the Church of God has been fulfilling the old command, "Lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes."

We see the marks of the true Church in this first ingathering of Pentecost. One command of God is to grow in knowledge. These three thousand continued steadfastly in the apostles' teachings as learners of the doctrine. (Vs. 42.)

And God showed unto them his marvelous grace in protecting them. He would not allow them to be submerged at the outset under a storm of persecution. The wind will blow upon them fiercely enough by and by, but at present, while the tree is rooting, God protects them from the cold north winds. They grew in favor with the people and fear came upon every soul. (Vs. 43, 47.)

C. W. Grafton.

"Nothing doth so much to establish the mind amidst the rolling and turbulency of present things, as a look above, and a look beyond them, above them to the good and steady Hand by which they are ruled, and beyond them to the sweet and beautiful end to which by that Hand they shall be brought.—R. Leighton.

Very often the best way of fighting temptation is to cease fighting, fill the mind with Christ and holy thought, and then trust quietly to the delivering power of His Holy Spirit.—R. J. Campbell.

He that prayeth for another is heard for himself.—Jewish Proverb.